New Year Customs.

On one of the seven hills of Rome there is a spot where it is said St. Peter was crucified, and over this spot is built a little temple in his honor. The hill upon which is reared this temple was named after Janus and called Janiculum—changed in these later days to Montorio, or Gold mountain. Janus founded a city, and after his death he became a god in the popular fancy. To him were dedicated temples for heathen worship. He was the god of the seasons, and is generally represented with two faces—the one dark and gloomy, as an emblem of the history of past ages; the other bright and smiling, as a symbol of a promising future. Sometimes four faces are used, representing the four seasons of the year. In his hand he holds as many rods as there are months in the year, one of which bears his name—January. The temples erected to him had four doors and three windows each. The doors represented the seasons and the windows the three months in each season. Pictures of Janus are frequently used in decorating New Year cards, stories and magazines.

As Rome gave the name to the first month in the calendar year, so Rome also gave the custom of making presents on the first day of the year—strenne, as they are called in Italian. A very innocent little pastime it was in the beginning, but in these days of modern ideas it has expanded and is expanding until now the most valuable and elaborate gifts are used as an exchange of friendly sentiment.

There was a goddess whose name was Strena. She was the patron of youth, health and strength, and the temple wherein she resided was surrounded by gardens containing plants possessing hygienic and health-giving properties. The verbena was considered, above all others, to possess the necessary attributes for restoring and preserving health, and therefore no Roman household was without this plant in its window gardens, on its verandas and wherever plants could be grown. So greatly was it valued that it was given as a prize at tournaments of strength to the victor, who usually presented it to his promised wife. Thus was inaugurated the custom of giving gifts at the New Year. The modest little "strenna" of verbena was the source of a custom that has developed to such proportions that no limit is now put upon the fancy or purse of those who wish to express their affection in this way.

Flowers, fruit and confections followed the verbena as time passed, and these in turn gave place to gifts of gold and silver and jewels. Then followed many abuses, for, once started, the tide was not easily turned. Newly elected consuls, in order to gain the public favor, were accustomed to ride through the streets New Year's day throwing money to the people. Then the accusation arose that men of wealth were elected instead of men of worth. Political bribery seems as old as the world. There were quarrels and bitter denunciations until it became necessary to pass a law forbidding the practice. Another meretricious habit derived from the strenna, and one which lasts to the present day, was that of superiors in office exacting tithes from their inferiors. It is related that the Emperor Augustus used to disguise himself and go about on New Year's eve begging a strenna from every one he met. This however, may have been simply a diversion, as even kings experience ennui in their lofty positions.

Occasionally to-day one will see large horns on each side of the principal entrances of old castles and palaces in Italy. These were placed there in olden times for each one passing to place a present within. Appropriate presents were doves for young girls, cakes for old people and stuffed birds and animals and medals with mottoes on them, similar to modern Christmas cards. On an old New Year medal recently found were the words "S. P. Q. R.—U. A. F. F.—Optimo Principi" (the senate and the people of Rome wish a happy year to the good prince).

Before the days of regular salaries for school teachers it was the custom for pupils on the first day of the year to present the master with a rod of gold of a size according to their means and he in turn gave them a kiss.

The Saxons kept the festival of the New Year with feasting and the presentation of gifts to each other. The gifts presented by individuals were suited to sex, rank, situation and circumstances. An orange stuck with cloves was a common present. Gloves were customary New Year gifts. They were formerly a more expensive article than at present, and occasionally a sum of money was given instead, which was called "glove money." When pins were invented and brought into use about the beginning of the 16th century they were a New Year's gift very acceptable to ladies, and money given for the purchase of them was called "pin-money." Pins were previously made of boxwood bone and silver for the richer classes. Those used by the poor were of common wood—in fact, skewers.

An old Roman superstition connected with New Year's day was to read the future by listening to the song of birds and watching their flight, to note the neighing of horses and bellowing of oxen, there being numerous signs and symbols connected with each, to show whether one will live through the coming year, be married or remain single, become rich or poor. Some made a long harangue and read their future from it. If it came out of the oven white it would be good luck, if the bread was heavy and sodden then there was to be sickness and misfortune. This custom is still kept up, more or less, only the loaf is now a cake, with the name written upon it, instead of bread. Another old custom that is still practiced is to give a supper on New Year's eve. But until the midnight hour sounds there is neither fire nor light, and absolute silence prevails. At the sound of the midnight stroke the house was suddenly illuminated and all the bells and musical instruments in the house are set going. Every one talks, sings and shouts "Eviva!" Then every one counts all the silver he possesses. No gold is shown, for that would bring bad luck. This belief that silver brings good luck is very old.

It is among the Chinese, however, that New Year's day is celebrated as the greatest holiday of the year. It is the only Sunday in the entire Chinese year and the people lay off work, put on their best clothes, if they have any (new, if possible), and rejoice and celebrate—fire crackers, give presents wrapped in red paper, call upon their friends, pay all their debts, take a bath (the only one in the year), and enjoy themselves in the greatest possible degree.

They are compelled to pay their debts on this day or go into bankruptcy, and it is a bad day for the debtor in China for the creditor can enter his house and help himself to anything he wants. Red—the most brilliant and gorgeous red possible—is over everything. Little signs with figures and symbols on their doors, red wrapping paper about their presents, and even eggs are painted red and offered to their gods. At night the air is red with the fire from burning crackers used to scare away the devils of misfortune and bad luck for the coming year. They sit up all night, for there is a superstition that the one who for ten successive years sees the sun rise New Year's morning will have a long life. A peculiar custom is that of the children running through the streets offering their small vices for sale in order that they may start the year with a clean record. "I want to sell all my little lies," they cry; or, "I want to sell my stealing habits"; or, "Who wants to buy my vanity, my selfishness and my bad temper?" Whether they ever find purchasers is not known.

THE WAY OF THE WORLD.

There grew in my garden a lovely lily,
That I watched and guarded with tender care
From its first up-springing to full unfolding,
And the pure white blossom wondrous fair.

A low wall circled my tiny garden,
Hiding my treasure from prying eyes,
But ever the blue skies arched above her
And the south wind kissed her with loving sighs.

And surely the south wind brought a message
From the prince's father over the wall,
And my darling listened and buried the secret
Deep in her heart beyond recall.

For, once as I walked about my garden,
That flaunting prince's feather leaned over the wall,
And my fair white lily bent before him
Her queenly head so stately and tall.

And I, as sadly I watched and listened
In jealous anger and heart-sick pain,
I heard her murmur with sweet insistence,
"I know that you love me, but—tell me again."

Ah, well, a-day. My tiny garden
Holds now no treasure, but, over the wall
There, by the side of the prince's feather,
Blooms a white lily stately and tall.

EMMA M. ROBISON.

WHAT DOES IT MATTER?

It matters little where I was born,
Or if my parents were rich or poor,
Whether they shrank at the cold world's scorn,
Or walked in the pride of wealth secure.

But whether I live an honest man,
And hold my integrity firm in my clutch,
I tell you, brother, plain as I am,
It matters much!

It matters little how long I stay
In a world of sorrow, sin and care;
Whether in youth I am called away,
Or live till my bones and pate are bare.

But whether I do the best I can
To soften the weight of adversity's touch
On the faded cheek of my fellow man,
It matters much!

It matters little where be my grave,
Or on the land or on the sea,
By purling brook or 'neath stormy wave,
It matters little or naught to me.

But whether at death God's angel calm
Doth mark my brow with this loving touch,
As one that shall bear the victor's palm,
It matters much!

—From the Swedish.

Questionable Compliment.

De Vere—I heard a compliment for you today.

Miss Antique—Indeed! What was it?

De Vere—Young Chapman says you carry your years well.—Town Topics.

The Greater Fatigue.

"I should think," she said, sympathetically, to the young man who acts, "that you would get tired of saying the same thing over and over."

"No," he answered, with pensive sadness, "it isn't that that makes us tired. It's hearing the same thing over and over when we ask for the salary that never came."—Washington Star.

HOW THE SHERIFF WON.

Thought I'd gallop in the race—
Office looked so hearty,
Sorter hankered fer the place—
Said so ter my party.

Sheriff—he'd been in so long,
Rollin' in the clover,
Voters got ter talkin' strong—
Thought they'd haul him over.

'Course, I had ter lectioneer
(Voters come by seekin'),
Read the sheriff's title clear,
Meet him at the speakin'.

Old man did his level best
(Every speech wuz tellin'!)
Rolled my sleeves up—jerked my vest—
Had the voters yellin'!

When he'd talk I'd call him down—
Every time I'd pin him,
Till he seen that, field an' town,
Campaign wus ag'in' him!

But—endurin' of the race
('Peared like I wux winner.)
Speakin' nigh the sheriff's place,
Axed me in ter dinner!

Then the trouble come for shore!
Took a drink o' water—
Some one standin' in the door—
"This here is my daughter!"

Gentlemen! I give a look—
Talk erbout yer cherries—
Faces in a pictur' book—
Peaches an' strawberries—

My! but they wuz nothin' like
With them ribbons on her;
Sorter felt the lightnin' strike—
Knowed I wux a goner!

Clean fergot my campaign speech—
Sorter knocked me silly;
Cheeks as rosy as a peach,
Thar she stood—a lily!

Well! the sheriff told a joke—
Talked erbout the weather,
Finally went out ter smoke—
Left us thar tergether.

Thar I sot! That purty face
Stings o' conscience givin';
Me a-makin' of a race
Fer her father's livin'!

Sich bright eyes an' dimple cheeks—
Eyes that seemed complainin'!
(Wouldn't meet in forty weeks
Sich a sight—campaignin'!)

What's the use ter beat erbout?
Campaigns ain't no funnin';
I decided I'd draw out—
Leave the sheriff runnin'!

Never did like politics!
Come without my seekin'—
Spendin' five days out o' six
'Roun' the country, speakin'!

Told the voter fur an' nigh,
Sheriff—he would win it;
When good men's in office, why—
Better keep 'em in it!

An' the sheriff stemmed the tide;
(Always thought he orter!)
We jest swapped! * * * I'm satisfied
With the sheriff's daughter!

—Frank L. Stanton, in Chicago Times-Herald.

Legends of a Christmas Tree

EARLY every Christian nation claims the honor of having given to the world the custom of the Christmas tree. Yet its origin is so obscure that no man may rightly say whence or where the beautiful usage began. A Scandinavian myth of great antiquity speaks of a "service tree" sprung from the blood-drenched soil where two lovers had been killed by violence in their innocence. At certain nights in the Christmas season mysterious lights were seen flaming in its branches that no wind could extinguish, says New York Herald.

The French have their legend as well. In a romance of the thirteenth century the hero finds a gigantic tree whose branches are covered with burning candles, some standing erect, and others upside down, and on the top the vision of a child, with a halo around his curly head. The knight asked the Pope for an explanation; he declared that the tree undoubtedly represented mankind, the child the Savior, and the candles good and bad human beings.

Wolfram von Elchenbach, the famous minstrel, sings of a prevailing custom of welcoming guests with branches ornamented with burning candles.

One tale bestows the honor upon Martin Luther. One Christmas eve, traveling alone over the snow covered country, the sky, with its thousands of glittering stars, made such a deep impression upon the reformer that after having arrived at home he tried to explain it to his wife and children. Suddenly an idea suggested itself to him. He went into the garden, cut off a little fir tree, dragged it into the nursery, put some candles on its branches and lighted them.

The most beautiful legend is of German origin and comes from that border land of history between pagan and Christian days.

"Harken, ye sons of the forest! No blood shall flow this night save that which pity has drawn from a mother's breast. For this is the birth night of the white Christ, the Son of the All-Father, the Savior of mankind. Fairer is he than Baldur the Beautiful, greater than Odin the Wise, kinder than Freya the Good. Since he has come sacrifice is ended. The dark Thor, on whom ye have vainly called, is dead. Deep in the shades of Niffelheim he is lost forever. And now on this Christ night ye shall begin to live. This blood tree shall darken your land no more. In the name of the Lord I will destroy it.'

"He grasped the broad ax from the hand of Gregor, and, striding to the oak, began to hew against it. Then the sole wonder in Winfrid's life came to pass. For, as the bright blade circled above his head, and the flakes of wood flew from the deepening gash in the body of the tree, a whirling wind passed over the forest. It gripped the oak from its foundation. Backward it fell like a tower, groaning as it split asunder in four pieces. But just behind it, and unharmed by the ruin, stood a young fir tree, pointing a green spire toward the stars.

"Winfrid let the ax drop, and turned to speak to the people:

"'This little tree, a young child of the forest, shall be your holy tree tonight. It is the wood of peace, for your houses are built of the fir. It is the sign of an endless life, for its leaves are ever green. See how it points upward to heaven. Let this be called the tree of the Christ-child; gather about it, not in the wild wood, but in your own homes; there it will shelter no deeds of blood, but loving gifts and rites of kindness.'

"So they took the tree from its place and carried it in joyous procession to the edge of the glade and laid it on one of the sledges. The horse tossed his head and drew bravely at his load, as if the new burden had lightened it. When they came to the village Alvoid bade them open the doors of his great hall and set the tree in the midst of it."

Historically the Christmas tree can only be traced back to the sixteenth suddenly appears in Strassburg. A valuable authentic manuscript of 1608, by a Strassburg burgher, now in a private collection in Friedberg, Hessen, describes the holidays very much as we are used to celebrate them. The manuscript of a book entitled "The Milk of Catechism," by the Strassburg theologian, Danhauer, mentions the same subject in a similar way. During the next 200 years the Christmas tree could only be met along the Rhine, when suddenly, at the beginning of this century, the habit spread all over Germany, and fifty years later had conquered the world.

The first description of a Christmas tree in modern literature is to be found in "The Nut-cracker," a fairy tale, by Fougue and Hoffmann.

In 1850 the Christmas tree was introduced by Queen Caroline into Munich. At the same time it beat its path through Bohemia into Hungary, where it became fashionable among the Magyar aristocracy.

In 1840 the Duchess Helena of Orleans brought it to the Tuileries, but it took many years before it became popular in France. Empress Eugenie also patronized it, but by the middle class it was still considered an intruder of Alsatian origin. In 1860 the German residents of Paris could procure a Christmas tree but with the greatest difficulty. However, nine years later they were regularly sold in the market. In 1870 the German army celebrated Christmas in the city of Notre Dame, and to-day Paris uses 50,000 trees each year, of which only about the fourth part are bought by Swiss, Germans, or Alsatians. The French plant the entire tree, with its root in a tub, so as to be able to preserve the tree until New Year, when it is "plundered."

Also London became acquainted with the habit through the royal palace. The Prince Consort brought it to St. James and it was quickly adopted by the nobility and well-to-do citizens. Also in other English cities it is frequently met with, though in a different manner. Immediately after dinner a little fir tree is handed about the table, with a present of the host to each guest. Scotch and Irish children know but little of the enjoyment a Christmas tree is sure to bring.

At the beginning of our century the custom was entirely unknown in Scandinavia, though they used to ornament their thresholds with fir tree branches. On the Islands Dago and Worms the inhabitants put five little candles on every branch of the Christmas tree, which is known to them almost as long as to the Strassburgers.

In America it has been introduced and quickly spread by the sturdy German emigrant, and of late years has become a universal custom.

ALONE.

Since she went home—
Longer the evening shadows linger here,
The winter days fill so much of the year,
And even summer winds are chill and drear,
Since she went home.

Since she went home—
The robin's note has touched a minor strain,
The old glad songs breathe a sad refrain,
And laughter sobs with hidden, bitter pain,
Since she went home.

Since she went home—
How still the empty rooms her presence blessed;
Untouched the pillows that her dear head pressed;
My lonely heart hath nowhere for its rest,
Since she went home.

Since she went home—
The long, long days have crept away like years,
The sunlight has been dimmed with doubts and fears,
And the dark nights have rained in lonely tears,
Since she went home.

—Robert J. Burdette.

The Christmas Rose.

"The Christmas rose!" And the holly and the mistletoe, in the pride of their evergreenness which has garlanded the years of all ages and climes, looked with disdainful wonder and disapproval at the modest little Christmas rose, which fair fingers had intertwined among the sinuous, glossy green foliage and scarlet white berries of a Christmas wreath.

"The Christmas rose!" And the holly rustled its shiny-toothed leaves so angrily at the little intruder that one of its sharpest points pierced the tender heart of the Christmas rose, and it felt that it was dying. As it lay quivering in agony it heard the proud boasting of the haughty evergreens and trembled at the scornful glances which they bestowed upon the humble little Christmas flower. For they boasted a lineage dipping back into the darkness of pagan antiquity.

"I—why, I have verdured the winters of ages," said the holly. "I have known all climes, all religions. In my hardiness and strength I have wreathed my shining leaves and bright red berries round columns and pillars which long since have fallen into ruins and crumbled away. I have trailed my enduring beauty through centuries, which have long since cycled into their past tense. I have decorated the altars of all religions with my brightness—the pagan temples of the ancient sun worshipers, the temples of the Greek god Jove, the temples of the Roman Saturn. I was baptized into christianity in the blood of the early Christians and my scarlet berries took on a ruddier hue. I was at one time both pagan and Christian, bedecking the pagan festivities of the Romans and at the same time screening with my thick clustering branches the worship of the Christians.

"I—oh, I am enduring; one of the earth's indispensables; a citizen of the world; a cosmopolitan of the universe!

"Even you," and he turned to the lovely, pale mistletoe, "even you cannot boast such world-wide popularity!"

In the heart of the mistletoe arose the mighty Celtic pride of ancestry; arose the mysticisms of the olden Druid days of ancient Wales, and in lofty scorn she replied: "Although in modern thought I have been associated chiefly with Christmas festivities and kisses, yet among my kinsmen, the ancient Celts, I have ever been held sacred; the mystical plant of the Druids and the principal object of their veneration; and when clinging to an oak, I was prized beyond rubies and pearls.

"I am Christmas evergreen now, but in the olden days my gala day was New Year's Day, when the great Druidical festival of the Welsh was celebrated. My cutting was the most solemn religious rite of the year. On this occasion the ancient Druids, habited in their white robes, wearing long beards and carrying wands, walked in solemn procession toward the oak on which I, the mystic plant, was growing. One of them ascended into the tree, and cut my clinging branches with a golden knife, while another stood below to catch me as I fell. And then," and she lifted her white berries in great pride, "and then two milk-white bulls were sacrificed in my honor, and great feasting and rejoicing were held in worship of the mystic mistletoe," and she looked with utmost complacency at the holly, and cast a withering glance at the shrinking Christmas rose. "While you," turning to the holly, "have pleased the eye of man with your beauty, I have given pleasure to his heart. How many times have my branches thrilled, and my berries trembled with the shock of that sweetest kiss, given under my magic boughs? I have been at once the peril and delight of beauty; and the golden opportunity of chivalry; and in the heart of both have I been frequently blessed," and with an air of supreme satisfaction that she had been instrumental in creating happiness she ceased speaking.

Yes, they were both aristocrats! And they turned a look of such calm disdainful scrutiny upon the now thoroughly humbled Christmas rose that it blushed rosily in its humiliation; and to this day it has retained its modesty and pink tips of its blushing petals.

And seeing its timidity they scornfully questioned its right to mingle its loveliness with their leaves and berries; and the Christmas rose breathed forth its longings to become a Christmas evergreen.

"It was so chill and dark in the earth's bosom; but one day a great trembling came upon the earth, and in the fissure above my head I saw the golden light; and the light drew me ever toward it, until at last I had left my dark hiding place and looked upon the fair white world; and I heard the singing of carols, which they told me were Christmas carols, and I heard the words Christ, and 'meek and lowly,' and somehow I was not afraid to be abroad in the world; for it seemed then to be filled with gentleness and the spirit of love. And my heart opened to the beauty and love of life and I gave to the Christmas time a fair white flower; and one day a Christian poet read in my blooming, my heart's desire to be a Christmas flower and add my share to the Christmas joyousness, and with loving fingers he took me up and twining me through your hardy branches he smilingly sainted me 'Fair Christmas rose!' and I was proud and happy, but now—" and the wounded rose shook with sobs and cries. And the proud holly and haughty mistletoe were touched, and catching the words "Christ" and "meek and lowly," they, remembering the lowliness of the Son of Man, repented of their harshness and scorn; and softly caressing the little Christmas rose, they adopted her into their wreaths, and gave her a joyous mission—to bloom for Christmas time! And the Christmas rose became one with the holly and mistletoe.

The New Year Chimes

Although church bells at all times speak to the heart and interpret its moods, sad or joyful, perhaps none speak as forcibly as the midnight chimes which usher in the glad New Year. The reason of this may be accounted for in a measure by the fact that at such an hour people stop to meditate, and they allow the sentiment of the season to take possession of their thoughts, says the Christian Standard. While there are those in every community whose natures are so reposeful and meditative as to listen to the ringing of the bells, the majority, we fear, at least in this land of ours, are in large part devoid of much sentiment, so crowded are their lives with material interests. But when abroad one is touched over and over again by the sound of bells. The oft-heard exclamation, "Hark, hear the bells," suggests at once that a subtle human feeling is accorded even to metal when in the form of a bell. One does not forget amid his many memories of foreign lands the delightful sound of the church bells in England, Scotland and Wales, not only in the cities, but in the quiet villages and retired country places; nor how worshipful and reverential the people seem as they respond to the call and wend their way to the churches.

Familiar to us all is that exquisite picture of Millet, in which he has portrayed with marvelous beauty the worshipful attitude of the peasants in the fields of sunny France, as, at the sound of the distant vesper bell, when "all the air a solemn stillness holds," they bow their heads reverently and lift their hearts at once to God and to heaven.

Many a traveler journeying through Alpine passes, and slowly climbing the wonderful mountains, has listened with joy to the vesper bell of some little chapel perched far aloft on Alpine height, or in the shelter of some rocky point shielded from the wild and wintry winds, as it called in kindly tones to the peasants in the green valleys far below, and to the mountaineers above, to come at the twilight hour and listen to the chanting of sweet hymns and to words of comfort and cheer from the pastor.

The deep and solemn tones of cathedral bells seem to call the worshipers to a more formal stately service. As they enter the sacred edifice and stand with uncovered heads in attitudes of awe and reverence, listen to the notes of the organ as they rise and fill the vaulted arches, their hearts are often lifted above and far away from earth, and for a brief time they seem to breathe a heavenly atmosphere and live in a heavenly clime.

Who that has lingered even for a few months in Italy, that land of sunshine and of song, can ever forget its bells and its chimes as they rung out in the clear air from hoary monasteries, its churchly cathedrals and its matchless campaniles? Not alone at matins and at vespers, and many times a day, but often, too, in the still nights, the priests in the churches and the monks in the monasteries ring the bells, say over their prayers and call many a worn but credulous believer from his pallet to worship in those midnight hours.

But of all bells in all climes, from those with silvery notes, which, in the far Orient, float out from airy minarets on the soft and languid air, to those which are harsh and unmusical, none have so forcible a language, or perhaps, speak so directly to the heart as the New Year chimes.

As midnight draws near, and we watch with bated breath the last moments of the dying year which pass so slowly and so solemnly, how full is the heart of the listener, and how with each stroke of the bell the experiences of the departing year come thronging to the mind.

The joys which the year has brought to some, the sorrows which it has brought to others; the weary burdens which have been carried by some, or the help in the carrying of them which has come to others; the gladness over the birth of a dear child, or the bitter sorrow experienced in laying one away in the grave; the prosperity which has come to one, the adversity which has overtaken another; the opportunities for good which have been improved and have brought blessing to many during the year just closing, and the opportunities unimproved, and now gone forever—all these and more come thronging to the minds of thousands claiming their thought in the last hour of the departing year. It is not strange, therefore, that as the stroke of twelve rings out on the midnight air unusual feelings of solemnity should possess us and dispel every trivial thought.

Charles Lamb, in one of his charming essays has expressed, in those words, his sentiments on the New Year bells:

"Of all sounds of all bells—bells—the music nighest bordering upon heaven—most solemn and touching is the peal which rings out the Old Year. I never hear it without a gathering up of my mind to a concentration of all the images that have been diffused over the past twelve months; all I have done and suffered, performed or neglected, in that regretted time. I begin to know its worth as when a person dies. It takes a personal color."

It is indeed a relief to the tense nerves to hear directly after this solemn peal the cheerful New Year chimes with their voices of hope and encouragement, stimulating to new endeavor and inspiring high hopes of what we may possess and do and give in the year just born.

These bells thrill our hearts with joy and help us echo the lines of Tennyson, when he sang:

"Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring happy bells, across the snow;
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true."